

*BEST COPY
Available*

PRE-ELECTION TENSION MOUNTS IN SYRIA

- I. Summary: Tension on eve 20 August elec indicates politicians' inability estab stable government; enhances chance milit intervention.

II. The Situation

- A. Political Confusion: Major old-line parties completely ineffectual; field thrown open to radicals, particularly Arab Socialist-Resurrectionist Party.
1. ASR supported by army group.
 2. May collaborate with Communist call for "national front."

- B. Labor Unrest: General strike averted; judges' now out. If continue, elections may be postponed since needed for election machinery.

- C. Campaign Violence: Armed clashes regularly.

III. Expectations (in order probability):

A. Very Weak Government: Old-line

politicians and independents will set up weak, coalition, government. Radical elements alone will gain.

B. Postponement Elections: If judges' strike not settled. Hard to predict exact form of resulting chaos.

C. Military Intervention: No evidence of immediate action, but: record of army intervention in politics. Assistant Chief of Staff strongly hinted readiness to act. Hawrani, of whom Malki is follower, reportedly planning coup before elections.

IV. Importance of Elections: may determine:

A. Whether Syria will have civilian or military government.

B. Whether Syria sides with Iraq or Egyptian-Saudi axis. If latter, then Lebanon, Jordan forced into same axis, and Iraq effectively isolated. Iraq wants Arab support for Turk-Pakistani pact.

CONFIDENTIAL